

Jessajima, Co.  
April 5, 1970

Dear Suzuki, Roshi

I would appreciate it if you would translate the attached letter to Jatsugami, Roshi. Thank you.

I hope that you are well. I am looking forward to seeing you.

Love,

Marian

Tassajara, Calif.  
April 5, 1970

Dear Tatsugami, Roshi,

I want to thank you sincerely for the great encouragement you have given me during the two months you were here at Tassajara. Suzuki, Roshi gave me a good start in the first essential of zen practice by helping me realize the importance of working constantly on improving my posture. Now, with your help, I am beginning to understand how important it is to work continually on harmonizing my breathing. It probably will take me many years of intensive and constant attention before my very inharmonious breathing begins to flow smoothly and naturally, but I know that until this happens I will be unable to work effectively on step number three, thinking the unthinkable.

I was very discouraged for a few days after our last dokusan. I was "taken by surprise" by your strong suggestion that I prepare to go to Japan to a nunnery soon after my ordination. I am grateful, now, however, for having had the chance to reflect in depth on my koan, and the opportunity it gave me to experience the strength and power of the vow that has "taken me".

Even though I have the deepest respect for your wisdom and judgement, and even though I want most sincerely to please you, and be worthy of your trust in accepting me as your disciple, I find that the vow not to leave Tassajara until the vow itself releases me prevents me from following your advice. I cannot go to Japan. I must not forsake my sitting place.

I am sure that you can give me many logical reasons why I should go to Japan and I can give you many logical reasons why I should stay here. Probably you feel that I need the guidance of a woman Roshi and the challenge of a stricter practice which a Japanese nunnery could give me. Probably you want to help me receive the training necessary to become a good zen teacher. You told me it would be good for me and for Tassajara if I went to a nunnery.

But even if I went to Japan immediately it would be five or ten years before I would be qualified to come back and teach. I can't wait that long! If you feel that I need the training and stricter practice that a nunnery can give me I must answer that every woman here also needs this training! Tassajara needs a woman zen teacher. If one doesn't come soon I am afraid that within a few years there will be no women left at Tassajara. Women zen students are at a great disadvantage in America because they have never studied with nuns and women Roshis. As for myself, it was less than six years ago that I met, for the first time in my life, a Zen Buddhist, and I have never met a Zen Buddhist nun. No wonder our practice seems to have no goal.

Still, women are needed at Tassajara. A completely integrated monastic practice must not neglect one half of the population. Having men and women together in a monastery creates many problems, but if it is not possible to work the problems out here, where can they be worked out?

The logical reasons why I should go to Japan, or why I should stay here, are really beside the point, however. At the deepest level the vow is unreasonable and ridiculous. It is completely useless. It will create many inconveniences and problems for myself and for others. I expect to be threatened, tempted, and severely tested before this koan of mine is solved. And in the end the only way it can be solved is by living it out fully and wholeheartedly. Meanwhile I can do nothing but hint at the reality and truth of this vow that has been entrusted to me:

Your true nature may be like a bird. For you the whole world is a mountain. My true nature may be like a tree. For me the mountain is the whole world. No one would call a bird unstable for moving about the world. No one would call the tree stubborn for clinging to the mountain. If the bird leaves the air it will die at once. If the tree leaves the earth it will die at once. Air makes the mountain and earth makes the mountain. The bird makes the mountain and the tree makes the mountain. Mountain makes the bird and mountain makes the tree. When the bird finds its way, when the tree finds its place, then practice follows and this is Enlightenment.

Rooted to this rock

Surrounded by canyon walls....

Help me, Daruma!

Sincerely,  
Marian